

HOME SECURITY AUDIT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Even though reports indicate that judges and other judicial branch personnel are more likely to be injured in a fall at home or in an automobile accident than in a work-related assault, increased violence in recent years has resulted in three judges being murdered at home. These deaths were directly connected to cases over which they presided. The home security audit that follows is designed to identify security risks and provide judges and other judicial branch personnel with basic personal security recommendations that can be used to protect them and their homes.

PERIMETERS/EXTERIOR OF THE HOME

1. Does the home have perimeter lighting? Yes ☐ No ☐

Recommendation: It is important that the entire yard is illuminated at night, without shadows.

Recommendation: Install motion detector lights for interior and exterior protection. Outside motion detector lights can be installed to automatically turn on interior lights, giving the impression someone has entered a room, at the same time the outside lights turn on.

2. Does the home have trees and shrubs that are overgrown to the point where they block easy view from within? Yes ☐ No ☐

Recommendation: Trim or remove thick shrubbery from window areas and replace them with shrubs that have thorns, like roses, near windows.

Recommendation: Trim or remove trees that may provide access to upper floor windows or balconies, and make sure trees or shrubs do not block a clear view of entries and windows from the street.

3. Does the home have outbuildings (detached garage, pool house, storage buildings) located on the property? Yes ☐ No ☐

Recommendation: Include all outbuildings into the main security system. Install quality residential locks on the buildings.

4. Do all perimeter doors provide protection from intruders? Yes ☐ No ☐

Recommendation: All perimeter doors should be solid core wood or steel with a deadbolt lock, in addition to any other locking device.

The door should have a peep hole installed to view any visitors prior to granting access to the home. No glass should be on the door that can be broken to gain entry. It is important that a three-inch strike plate for screws be installed in all entry doors.

Recommendation: Secure sliding glass doors with pins to prevent both horizontal and vertical movement, especially when the home is left vacant for an extended period of time. Sliding glass doors should be hung so that the sliding door is mounted on the inside. The door should be reinforced with a “jimmy-proof” bar to prevent forced entry.

Recommendation: Re-key or replace locks if keys are lost or stolen or if you move into a previously occupied residence. Make sure that you follow strict key control with keys used to access the home.

Recommendation: Be sure to restrict the number of keys to your residence. Keep keys in your possession; **DO NOT** hide keys outside under the mat, over doors, in mail slots, or in potted plants.

5. Are basement windows to the home secured? Yes ☐ No ☐

Recommendation: All basement windows should be secured from inside the home. Glass basement windows should be replaced by polycarbonate material or reinforced with decorative security bars. All ground shrubs in proximity to the basement windows should be trimmed or removed so that they do not provide potential intruders with cover from observation.

6. Does the home have an attached garage? Yes ☐ No ☐

Recommendation: Whenever possible, park vehicles in the garage. Always enter the vehicle from inside the garage. Always keep the garage doors closed and locked when not in use. In order to limit your exposure outside the vehicle during the hours of darkness, install an automatic garage door opener and make sure all family members know how to operate the garage door manually in the event of an emergency. Ensure that the door from the garage into the main house itself is a solid core door with a deadbolt locking device.

Recommendation: If there is a vehicle parked outside, make sure the area is well-lighted. If at all possible, have a remote starter installed in all vehicles, especially if they are parked outside. This device will allow you to start your vehicle from a safe distance.

7. Does the mail box or the entry of the home personally identify the occupants? Yes ☐ No ☐

INTERIOR OF THE HOME

1. Does the home have an anti-intrusion alarm system? Yes ☐ No ☐

Recommendation: Consider installing an anti-intrusion alarm system

in the home that is tied into the local police department or a certified central alarm monitoring organization. Instruct family members on the operation of the system. Consider installing a local enunciation system or siren. The advantage of a siren is to alert neighbors to notify authorities, should the direct-connect alarm lines be compromised.

Recommendation: As an added security measure, alarm systems can be customized to provide monitoring for fire, medical alert, and closed circuit television (CCTV) surveillance of home exterior. The presence of cameras on the outside of the home is a definite deterrent to would-be intruders.

Recommendation: If you have a monitored intrusion detection system, display the monitoring company's decal or sign prominently on doors, windows, and in the yard to announce the presence of a security alarm system in the home.

2. Do you have smoke/heat detectors installed throughout the home? Yes ☐ No ☐

Recommendation: Smoke alarms and heat detectors should be installed throughout the home. They should be hard-wired into the home's electrical system with a battery backup in the event of a power failure. In addition, install and maintain all-purpose fire extinguishers throughout the home, especially in the kitchen.

Recommendation: Establish and periodically test fire evacuation procedures for all family members.

3. Is the exterior door leading from the basement to the upper floor made of solid core and equipped with a deadbolt lock? Yes ☐ No ☐

Recommendation: As with other exterior doors in the home, it is important that the basement door be of solid core wood or steel construction and equipped with a quality deadbolt lock to prevent entry by intruders.

4. Can the interior of the home be accessed through windows or other openings from the second floor or roof? Yes ☐ No ☐

Recommendation: All second floor windows and roof skylights must be secured to prevent access by intruders who could use drainpipes and other means to access the roof or upper floors.

5. Does the home have louver-type windows? Yes ☐ No ☐

Recommendation: Louvre windows should be replaced with solid windows made with tempered or shatterproof material.

6. Do all windows have adequate window coverings? Yes ☐ No ☐

Recommendation: Windows should be equipped with internal blinds, curtains, drapes, or shutters to prevent someone from seeing inside.

CONDOMINIUM AND APARTMENT SECURITY

Security in condominium and apartment complexes must be a cooperative effort between residents, management, maintenance workers, and police. All must work together to provide the best possible security for the building. Most of the recommendations for single-family dwellings apply to condominiums and apartment complexes. The following is an audit that is particular to those type buildings.

1. Do all doors and windows have locks that will secure the condominium/apartment while it is vacant? Yes ☐ No ☐

Recommendation: Examine all locks on doors and windows to ensure they are working properly. Before leaving the condominium/apartment, make sure all doors and windows are locked. Always double-check locked access windows that are at ground level.

2. Does your complex have a separate “Laundromat” area? Yes ☐ No ☐

Recommendation: If at all possible, avoid using the Laundromat in your complex by yourself. Always team up with a neighbor who you know and trust.

3. Does your complex have a building association or a way to alert residents of an emergency? Yes ☐ No ☐

Recommendation: Develop an apartment alert system with neighbors in the complex to help protect each other’s property. A well-organized and active tenant association will assist in deterring intruders.

Recommendation: Get to know the tenants in the complex. After you meet them, make a personal contact list for future use.

4. Does the complex have an electronic access system to control entry into the building? Yes ☐ No ☐

Recommendation: Do not allow access to strangers by “buzzing” them into the building. If someone enters the building by following you in, and that person is unknown to you, do not ride the elevator with them. If needed, exit the building and then re-enter later.

Recommendation: Report suspicious strangers, sounds, or actions to

police, then notify the complex manager.

MAIL SECURITY

If you receive mail at your home, be wary of suspicious letters or packages. Do not open a letter that appears to be unusual in any way, particularly if it has a perceptible bump, which might be an explosive device. Notify law enforcement immediately of any unexplained package in or near your home. You should notify law enforcement when mail items have any suspicious features, such as:

- Excessive weight, size, or postage
- Springiness in the top, bottom, or sides of the envelope
- Wires or strings protruding from or attached to the envelope
- Envelope has uneven balance or a peculiar odor
- Stiffening of an envelope with cards or other material (such stiffening could be a spring-loaded explosive striker)
- No return address or the place of origin is unusual or unknown
- Name is misspelled

All such items should be isolated. Only trained law enforcement professionals should be allowed to open suspicious mail.

FAMILY SECURITY RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation: If at all possible, your home telephone number should be unlisted.

Recommendation: Family members, including care givers, should never tell anyone you are out of the house. They should be instructed to take messages from callers only.

Recommendation: Emergency police and fire numbers should be programmed into the telephone using the “In Case of Emergency” (ICE) concept. If you do not have a programmable phone, you should post emergency numbers near the main telephone in the home.

Recommendation: Do not discuss family plans with outsiders. Even your friends should not be informed. In general, do not discuss your family’s comings and goings.

Recommendation: Family members should not stop at the same supermarket at the same time on the same day each week. Vary your daily activities.

Recommendation: Children should be instructed not to open doors to strangers. All visitors should be viewed through a peephole with the door locked. Intercom systems should be used to aid in the identification of strangers.

Recommendation: If it is necessary to leave children at home, keep the house well-lighted and notify the neighbors.

Recommendation: Advise your children to:

- Never leave home without advising parents where they will be and who will accompany

them.

- Travel in pairs or groups.
- Walk along busy streets and avoid isolated areas.
- Use play areas where recreational activities are supervised by responsible adults and where police protection is readily available.
- Refuse automobile rides from strangers and refuse to accompany strangers anywhere on foot—even if the strangers say mom or dad sent them or said it was okay.
- Report immediately to the nearest person of authority (teacher or police) anyone who attempts to molest or annoy a child.

Recommendation: Be wary of strangers. Be watchful of strange cars that seem to cruise the neighborhood or strange persons who suddenly start to frequent the neighborhood streets. Record information that may be helpful to police.

Recommendation: Observe cars parked in the neighborhood with one or more persons inside or persons who seem to be doing nothing in particular.

Recommendation: Never reveal to any stranger that you are home alone.

Recommendation: Know where your children are at all times. Maintain a daily itinerary and stress the importance of notifying other family members of changes in the schedule.

Recommendation: As mentioned above, have unlisted telephone numbers for ALL family members.

Recommendation: Always request salesmen, repairmen, meter readers, delivery personnel, and even policemen (in civilian clothes) to show their identification prior to admitting them into your home. If in doubt about their identity, place a call to their business to confirm employment. Never accept a phone number that they offer; always use the telephone directory or call the information operator.

Recommendation: Do not put your home telephone number on stationary or on any name and address stickers in order to preclude undesirable telephone calls.

Recommendation: When harassing or obscene telephone calls are received, take action to change your phone number immediately. Family members should never engage in a telephone conversation with unknown or unidentified persons.

Recommendation: Children must follow a school schedule, but if they are driven to school, varied routes should be followed. Children should be escorted to and from bus stops. Neither hiking nor walking to school is recommended.

Recommendation: Inform school authorities that children should not be released from school, athletic events, and club meetings on the strength of a telephone call. Advise the school authorities to confirm the call with your home or office.

Recommendation: Instruct the school administration that if an authorized person does not

explain a child's absence from school shortly after school starts, they are to call the child's home or your office to determine the child's status.

Recommendation: Do not open doors to strangers or accept delivery of packages unless the sender is known. Instruct children and in-home help on this procedure. Install a chain lock on the main entry door so that you may accept small packages or letters by partially opening the door. Do not rely heavily on this type of lock, as an intruder can break them away by forcing the door.

Recommendation: Check references of service personnel, domestics and childcare providers, and any other employees who have routine access to your residence or property.

Recommendation: When receiving a wrong number telephone call, never give your name or number. Just state that the caller has the wrong number.

Recommendation: When a stranger requests to use your telephone for an emergency, never allow entry into the home. Offer to summon assistance, and use the phone yourself.

Recommendation: Never answer your telephone with your name; a simple hello is acceptable.

Recommendation: Report all suspicious activity to the local police.

TRAVEL RECOMMENDATIONS

Whether you are going to the store or Europe, the fact that you have left your home or office changes your security status **SIGNIFICANTLY**. Travel decreases your security because you are not adhering to your routine, but instead, you are exposed to unfamiliar surroundings. If you plan to travel outside your home area or overseas, you should check with your director of security for additional security measures that can be taken to protect you and your family.

VEHICULAR TRAVEL RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation: Do not pick up strangers or give a ride to a stranger or volunteer your car to a group of strangers even though you may have a friend with you in the car.

Recommendation: If you should have car trouble on the road, drive to the side of the road and place a handkerchief or white cloth on the radio antenna or door facing traffic. Either place a cell phone call or wait for help to come.

Recommendation: If you are driving and an attempt is made to force you off the road, move toward the center of the roadway and quickly proceed to a busy street and seek assistance. As you proceed, blow your horn to attract attention to your plight.

Recommendation: Do not stop to aid other motorists or pedestrians, regardless of the circumstances. If you believe the emergency is genuine, use a cell phone or proceed to a public phone and report the matter to authorities, then let them handle the emergency.

Recommendation: If you suspect you are being followed:

- Circle the block to confirm the surveillance.

- Do not stop or take other actions that could lead to a confrontation.
- Do not drive home.
- Do not try to evade or elude the follower.
- Obtain a description of the vehicle and its occupants.
- Go to the nearest police or fire station and report the incident.
- Have an alternative safe place to go in the event you cannot get to the police station.
- Report the incident to police once you are safe.

Recommendation: Avoid using magnetic key boxes hidden in the wheel well of your car.

Recommendation: Park your car in a secured garage; do not park your car on a public street.

GENERAL SECURITY RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation: Place the police emergency telephone number (911), and the police non-emergency number next to the phone in your home for immediate use; program it into your telephone system if possible. Do not answer the telephone with your name or official title.

Recommendation: Ladders and scaffolding should be kept in locked outbuildings or garages.

Recommendation: Advise the local police department of your occupation and address. Complete and submit a judicial profile for you and your family (attached), to the chief security officer for use in emergencies. Judicial profiles should be protected as “confidential-restricted access” documents.

Recommendation: Consider moving all fuse and switch boxes into the home if possible. Place locks on those that remain outside or in outbuildings/garages.

Recommendation: Consider a trained watchdog for the family residence. In addition to being a natural deterrent, it is another means of alarming the home.

Recommendation: Be constantly aware of surveillance. Usually a potential victim is watched for several days before an act of violence is carried out.

Recommendation: Prepare an inventory of household and personal possessions, describing the articles and listing the serial numbers for reference.

Recommendation: In order that personal items (jewelry, appliances, TV sets, radios, etc.) can be identified if lost or stolen, a code number should be engraved on each item with an etching machine.

Recommendation: A small safe or security box, which can be bolted down to a closet floor, should be used to secure personal jewelry, cash, and personal documents that are frequently used. Consider a safety deposit box for items used less frequently.

Recommendation: When the home is left vacant, install timers on televisions, radios, and lights in order to give the impression that the home is occupied.

Recommendation: Have “Caller ID” for incoming telephone calls to your home. Use “Caller

ID” blocking to prevent your telephone number from being displayed on outgoing calls.

Recommendation: Become familiar with the streets and roads surrounding your home. Have a planned escape route from your home to a designated safe place in case of fire or intrusion.

Recommendation: Plan and practice driving to area emergency services, such as hospitals, police stations, and safe places.

Recommendation: Make sure your trash is kept in a secure place, such as a locked outbuilding.

Recommendation: Keep the names, addresses, and telephone numbers for all staff members handy in the event of an emergency.

Recommendation: If you have household employees, make sure they have been screened with background checks.

**For further information contact:
National Center for State Courts
Court Consulting Services
707 17th Street – Suite 2900
Denver, CO 80202
(303) 305-4315**



This document was prepared by Jim O’Neil, NCSC Consultant
Revised: February 2009